Unofficial English version provided by the author of the Italian paper published in:
BOLLETTINO DELLA SOCIETA GEOGRAFICA ITALIANA
ROMA - Serie XIII, vol. VII (2014), pp. 63-79

BÉNÉDICTE FLORIN

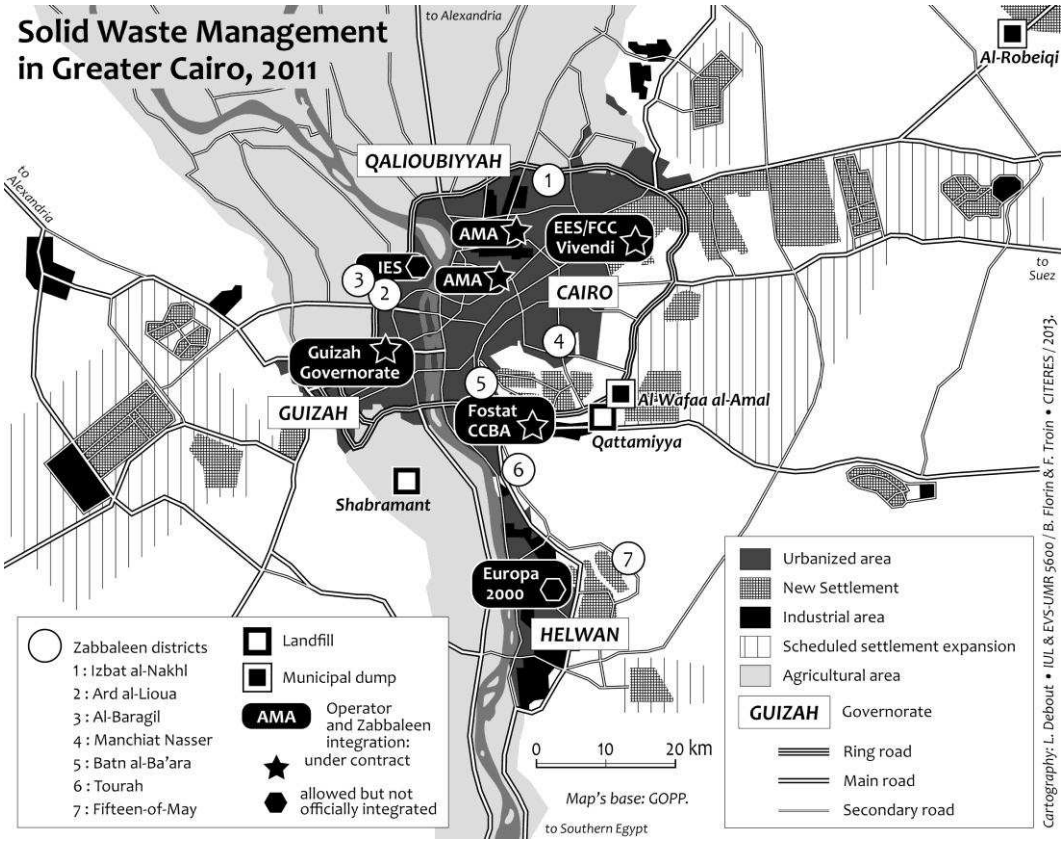
FROM MARGINALISATION TO INJUSTICE, FROM INJUSTICE TO REVOLT: URBANITY AND CITIZENSHIP AT THE MARGINS

> « Seul le terrain nous permet de révéler, par plaques, des morceaux de la compétence ordinaire demeurés jusque là sous-estimés, réduits ou ignorés. C'est la dignité des gens d'être capables de plus de choses qu'on ne croit. » (*It is only at the grass-roots that we can glimpse patchy fragments of day-to-day skills, previously under-estimated, belittled or ignored. It is the dignity of people to be capable of doing more than we think.*)
>
> (L. Boltanski, *L'amour et la justice comme compétences*, 1990, pp. 133-134)

Abstract - There has been a dramatic rise in the number of social uprisings in Egypt since 2000. While these uprisings have often been repressed, they have contributed to the emergence of debates about the rights to work and to housing, and more generally about social justice, an issue which became one of the watchwords of the revolution of January 2011. The aim of this article is to analyze the movement of the rag-pickers of Cairo, who since 2003 have been opposing the neoliberal reform of the waste-management system which has deprived them of their work. Since then, this socially and spatially marginalized professional corporation has taken front stage and contributed to the construction of a "public problem" about waste.

The number of social uprisings in Cairo increased between the early 2000s and the revolution of January 2011. Played out in central or outlying spaces, but seen by the dominant players as marginal, these movements were started by more or less marginalized people striving to make themselves seen and heard, and who to a greater or less extent succeeded in becoming the focus of attention. In the first part, we put forward the hypothesis that marginalisation is not itself a cause of uprising; it is when

it becomes an issue of social and spatial injustice, through the voice of the *in-ouïs* (Boullier, 2009), those who are not heard, that it becomes a resistance movement. True, these social uprisings have been fleeting, often repressed under Mubarak; true, the effects of these demonstrations of anger have been very varied, but nonetheless they have contributed to the construction of "public problems" related to the rights to housing and to work, and more broadly, to the issue of justice.



The second part of this paper analyzes the process of constructing one of these "public problems[1]" related to the rag-pickers of Cairo defending their right to work. Due to the reform of the waste-management system decided by the State in 2000, garbage collection has become a major "public problem", visible in public spaces, involving a wide range of people with complex and often conflictual relationships. The rag-pickers find themselves at the heart of a veritable storm arising from a neoliberal reform that effectively excluded them. Finally, apart from the specific example of the rag-pickers, these

1 We refer here to the article by C. Gilbert and E. Henry: "*Many studies have in effect shown how situations described as problematic take on the characteristics of public problems […] and how these public problems come to figure on the agenda of the public authorities […]. This type of approach has been useful to show that a problem that emerges with a degree of "evidence" is in fact the result of a complex process of mobilization and collective action, and that its management by public institutions also depend on specific considerations […]."* (Gilbert, Henry, 2012, p. 36).

successive shifts – from marginalisation to injustice, from injustice to revolt – raise questions about the relationship between urbanity and citizenship, opening a debate about the political dimension of injustice.

I – From marginalisation to injustice, from injustice to uprising

1 – When the margins make themselves seen and heard

Since the beginning of the 2000s, there has been a fascinating convergence of "small" social movements[2] in Egypt, particularly in Cairo. Generally scattered and sectoral, they have often gone unnoticed. They are not "bread riots", but a demand for rights: the right to housing, the right to work, the right to land. These demands have often, though not always[3], been made by groups and/or spaces considered as marginal by the public authorities, for all sorts of reasons that are too long to go into here, apart from mentioning that we will focus on "informal" and poor, even very poor, districts, but which are not necessarily situated on the outskirts of the metropolis. By way of example, the inhabitants of the district of Dueqqa demonstrated against the public authorities and the slow and ineffective response to the collapse of a section of the cliff of Muqattam, which led to a large number of casualties and deaths; in this very poor district, excluded from urban policies and policies in general, the feeling of being abandoned and excluded gave way to anger. In another example, the inhabitants of Boula Abu 'Ela, a poor district in the centre of town, very close to the now famous Tahrir Square, attempted to resist the major development project that threatened their neighbourhood. Less central, the settlement at Batn al-Baqara (literally, the cow's entrails), situated in a "hole" in the town (a former quarry) is completely surrounded by private property developments. The developers sought to make the inhabitants move out by intimidation, with the support of the police and the help of "strong arms". Following the revolution of January 2011, the inhabitants came together to resist the developers, asserting that they were no longer afraid, that they would no longer allow themselves to be pushed around, and that they now had rights[4]. It seems that the revolution effectively at least liberated the power of expression, as described by an inhabitant of Boulaq[5] and confirmed by residents of Batn al

2 This sub-section follows discussions with Agnès Deboulet who has worked on the right to housing in Cairo. It is notably thanks to her that I read about the *in-ouïs*, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to her.

3 From the 2000s, the "*Kefaya*" ("Enough") movement brought together intellectuals protesting and demonstrating in public against the Mubarak regime. For more information about Kefaya and the social movements which, "*while they cannot be considered as warning signs of the fall of Mubarak, (...) they did in a certain way facilitate it*", the reader can refer to the very well-documented articles by Sarah Ben Nefissa (2007 and 2011).

4 These quotations are taken from interviews I had in Batn el-Baqara with rag-pickers living and working there.

5 This can be seen and heard on the very interesting video about this district of Boulaq Abu 'Ela:

Baqara. But even before the revolution, there were demands regarding the right to housing, the right to remain in town and not to be thrown out, and the right to land tenure security. The spatial aspect is thus fundamental in these resistance movements, because their aim was to defend living spaces. Movements for the right to work have increased during the last decade, first when workers in the textile factories of the Delta went on strike, then when the peasant farmers of Upper Egypt organized sit-ins at the Ministry of Agriculture, and finally the protest movements of the rag-pickers of Egypt, discussed below.

It was political protest groups such as *Kefaya* that brought together the various demands and gave them a more generalist and universalist dimension, referring to issues of democratisation, freedom, human rights, etc. Likewise, the demands relayed by the social media were both specific and generalist.

Rhetoric and justice

These two issues of the right to housing and the right to work, while clearly separate in the pre-revolutionary movements, both broadly concern the issue of "justice", which was a key demand of the Egyptian revolution of 2011, which called not only for social justice[6] (*ɛdala ijtimɛyya*), brandished on numerous placards, but also for justice itself, as shown in all the expressions referring to the corruption

http://vimeo.com/35231958

6 S*ocial justice* was one of the first slogans to be chanted in Tahrir Square by the intellectual elite, the parties of the left, by *Kifâya*, the unionists and the young liberal bloggers. It was also used frequently by militants on Facebook, linked to economic and social demands, for the rights of workers, about inequalities in standards of living, price rises, the deterioration of public services, etc. It was fairly soon replaced by more concrete and radical slogans, such as "*The people want the President to go/ the fall of the regime/ the death penalty for the President*".

of the Mubarak regime and calling explicitly for a trial and hence for justice to be done [7]. We can also mention one of the groups involved in the Revolutionary Youth coalition, which called itself "Youth for justice and freedom", and also the new Egyptian Federation of independent unions, created during the revolution, which demanded "*the right to work (…), the rights to education, housing and health (…)*". Last but not least, the word "justice" was incorporated in the "Party for Liberty and Justice", founded on 30th April 2011 by the Muslim Brotherhood who won the legislative and presidential elections.

The other slogans used by the crowd in Tahrir Square, such as "dignity" (*karama*) and "liberty" (*horiyya*), also testify to the fact that far from being a new "revolt of the starving", violently repressed in the past (Farag, 2011), the political revolution of the Egyptian spring was the unexpected culmination of the many social demands described above, calling for more justice and emerging in specific places (the inhabitants of districts under threat), among specific social groups (workers, civil servants, peasant farmers, etc.), political groups and journalists, or reformist judges using the tribunal as a place for political protest (Bernard-Maugiron & Nasser, 2000).

While references to justice and law(s) have been particularly frequent in Egypt recently, it is significant that they have taken place and been focused in Tahrir Square – Liberation Square – a central public space that became the epicentre of the revolution. "*The occupation of public spaces, the right to speak enabled by all these open tribunals, created new, multiform collectives. One of the main issues they share is the demand for justice. The strength of these movements is that they resonate with a large proportion of the population of the country concerned (…). This realization of the right to occupy public space and turn it into an open tribunal clearly constitutes a demand for spatial justice*" (Dufaux et al., 2011). If we accept this view, there is a clear spatial dimension to the social uprisings in Cairo and the major cities of the country, forerunners of the 2011revolution, particularly those that occurred in central public spaces close to the seats of power. But they tend to eclipse or belittle the role of other less visible movements, which occasionally erupted spontaneously in central or peripheral public spaces, considered nonetheless as marginal, and instigated by more or less marginalized groups of people who have long been perceived as silent and invisible.

7 In early 2012, a year after the revolution, exasperated by the slowness of the trials of those responsible and rumours of their acquittal, the demonstrators erected symbolic tribunals in Tahrir Square to judge the Mubarak family, the former Minister of the Interior, and the former Public Prosecutor. The accusations of the demonstrators concerned corruption, the murder of demonstrators, money laundering, the confiscation of public goods and State-owned land, etc.

3 - Injustice: the driving force of the in-ouïs

The hypothesis that I put forward here is that it is the perception and experience of injustice rather than marginalisation itself that is the driving force of the margins. In other words, marginalisation as such is not really a particular problem for the authorities in an authoritarian State. For the inhabitants, according to Robert Castel, the margin is often the only space where they can make use of their talents[8], although this view could no doubt be moderated. Castel went on to suggest that marginalisation is "an effect of concerted procedures for exclusion"[9], founded on, and the product of, inequalities. Nevertheless, marginalisation does not always equal injustice (Gervais-Lambony, 2009), and similarly, inequality does not always equal injustice. Accordingly, it seems that it is the perception and

8 The people living on the margins are not confined to these margins (social and/or spatial) and their "talents" can be put to use outside the margins (social and/or spatial). We can raise the question here of the role of clientelist networks for example. We refer the reader to studies carried out in the 1990s and 2000s on the skills and "art of doing" of ordinary city dwellers.

9 We follow the meaning given to these terms by Robert Castel as follows: "*Marginality is the effect of concerted procedures for exclusion […]. To give a minimum of precision to this term, it is necessary to take into account the ritualized procedures sanctioning the exclusion. They are very varied, but all concern a judgment passed by an official body, based on regulations and involving state bodies […]. Marginality (or rather marginalisation) is a social construct arising from the fundamental structures of society, the organization of work, and the system of dominant values which determine the distribution of roles and the creation of hierarchies, allocating social dignity or indignity to each individual*" (Castel, 1996, p. 35 and 38).

experience of injustice that explains the uprisings at the margins and which are expressed by strategies, or, in the examples discussed here, by "the small tactics of the weak" (De Certeau, 1990), involving resistance, protest, or even revolt, in an attempt to mitigate the effects of this injustice. Having said that, these strategies/tactics do not always meet their objectives, and they are characterized by their unequal nature and their results, which are frequently also very unequal.

In any event, and to paraphrase D. Bouillier, "*the inouïs have spoken*". The *in-ouïs* are literally people who are unseen or unheard because they do not speak via the recognized media in a given political system, those for whom to speak out is forbidden, or whose voices are drowned out by noise, such that once again they are not heard (Bouiller, 2009).

These resistance movements are not taken seriously and often go unnoticed (e.g., the rag-pickers' demonstrations, although a number of people were injured, were reported in only two articles) because they involve people who are a priori disqualified, notably from any political participation, and who are defined and qualified by what they lack (money, means, culture, knowledge, skills, expertise, etc.) rather than by their qualities. They are also unobtrusive, living in peripheral, out-lying districts on the fringes or in recesses of the city that are difficult to access. They never have a "storefront", and in a certain way they are characterized spatially, notably because in Egypt the term "*ashwaiyya",* which defines that which is informal, is stigmatizing, even though this urban form makes up more than half of the city. Furthermore, when these *inouïs* do speak, they demand "small things" that are local and individual: their speech is too peculiar, too partisan, or even irrational (Boulier, 2009). Their speech is all the more inaudible and forbidden in that the authoritarian regime is terribly afraid of "the streets".

However, and perhaps unexpectedly (at least for the public authorities), the accumulation of these multiple and repeated small resistance movements of the weak, associated with other actions, ultimately led to the construction of a "public problem", linked either to housing[10], or, as described below, to work.

II –The construction of a "public problem": the rag-pickers' right to work

1- From public space to the public sphere, or coming out of the margins

The effect of the above-mentioned movements is one of "coming out of the margins", in other words of making public an injustice that has been done. This coming out (literally, because it involves leaving the margins to demonstrate) cannot fail to be risky and ephemeral in a country in which all rallies and

10 With regard to housing, A. Deboulet observed that social uprisings have increased since 2000 in districts with no land tenure security, including cases brought for the recognition of land rights. A lexicon has also emerged in Egypt to refer to human rights, together with a rhetoric about the right to housing and to the city, relayed by international and local NGOs. The role played by the social media is essential in disseminating information about these movements.

public meetings are prohibited under emergency law, enforced since the assassination of Sadat in 1981. The fact that the demonstrators know about this law, and know beforehand that the response to any demonstration will be violent repression by the police, shows their determination to act against the injustice done to them.

This process can be illustrated by the demonstrations and movements of the rag-pickers, a previously stigmatised group of waste recyclers. In 2000, the waste-management system was reformed and handed over to European multinationals. Overnight, the *zabaleen*[11], the informal sector of rag-pickers, who had collected and recycled the city's garbage for more than half a century, were excluded. As a result of the reform, any waste collection was treated as theft, and the zabaleen's work was no longer informal but illegal. On 3rd February 2003, the rag-pickers of 'Art el-Lewa, a small settlement on the outskirts of the city, organized a spontaneous demonstration, where it was decided to organize a public rally with the slogan "For the protection of the rights of workers, against State aggression!"[12]. The demonstrators were violently dispersed by the police and the three leaders were arrested; they were released shortly afterwards. In Manchiat Nasser, another settlement of 40,000 rag-pickers, the same feeling of humiliation and injustice prevailed. Following an illegal public meeting, they decided to block the large ring-road below their settlement. There were violent clashes with the security forces, leading to a number of injuries and the arrest of four demonstrators (Dollet, 2003; Rashed, 2003).

11 The word *zabaleen* (sing. *zabal*) comes from the word *zebala*, meaning garbage, filth, dustbin. The meaning of zebala is particularly laden, because it is the etymological root of both the waste matter and the person who collects it, the *zabal*. More broadly, it refers to the professional identity, the corporation of the zabaleen, and finally to their neighbourhoods which are exclusively reserved for sorting the waste and keeping pigs (Florin, 2011, p.72).). The overlap of individual and collective, of professional and spatial identity, forms the basis of the corporation and sets it in space.

12 Soazig Dollet was in Cairo in 2003 to work on her Political Sciences Master's degree on *Une communauté traditionnelle face à la modernité. Le cas des zabbâlin du Caire (A traditional community confronted by modernity. The case of the zabaleen in Cairo)*. She was thus able to follow closely the changes taking place and the immediate effects of the reform on the rag-pickers' community. Some of the information about the 2003 demonstrations is thus based on her work. We have added the only two articles reporting these demonstrations by Dena Rashed, a journalist for the *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "Trashed Lives" and "Indigenous space". http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2003/625/eg7.htm
http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2003/624/fe1.htm

The spatial dimension is essential in this process of "publicising" injustice, and yet the feeling of these *inouïs*[13] of not being legitimately able to occupy the public space, and hence to make themselves heard, was instrumental in the choice of where to demonstrate, namely close to their neighbourhoods so that they could withdraw rapidly when the confrontations became too violent. The internalisation of the highly authoritarian character of the State and of police violence is one of the factors explaining the limits of the collective movements in the public space. In the case of these demonstrations, the failure is not linked to resignation on the part of the *zabaleen*, but rather to the acute awareness of the fact that protest actions cannot be held in the public space without unleashing a brutal crackdown (Florin, 2011).

The crisis raised heated debates within the community of rag-pickers. The bosses and community and religious leaders opposed the demonstrators and the very principle of the demonstration. The best placed individuals opted for negotiations with the authorities. In the end, action was made possible through relationships and networks of political and community authorities.

13 Before 2002, the rag-pickers of Cairo were particularly invisible in the city in spite of their work collecting rubbish. The community is highly stigmatized because it is Copt (a religious minority), because they live off waste (impure), and because they keep pigs (impure). To cope with this stigmatization, the rag-pickers have adopted a life of discretion.

2 – A new public problem: garbage and "garbage workers"[14]

It is clear that the demonstrations failed to achieve recognition of the rag-pickers' right to work (beginning with the right to have access to garbage), but indirectly they led to the gradual construction of a "public problem". True, these demonstrations were very localized, but however slight they might appear, they brought about other changes: the occupation of public space, more and more public meetings in the rag-pickers' settlements, the circulation and spread of news between districts, people who had never previously been heard speaking out in public against the injustice done to the rag-pickers, brushed aside in the name of economic liberalization and urban modernisation[15]. In any event, a public problem was built up around the garbage issue, which directly concerned the right to work of the rag-pickers based on their access to garbage.

Before 2000, the garbage issue was barely touched on in public, and only one article mentioned the zabaleen, who although they had been collecting the garbage of the Cairenes since the 1930s were better known abroad than in their home city. While the decision to delegate waste management in 2000 passed relatively unnoticed, the arrival of the foreign waste-collection companies, the reaction of the zabaleen, and the speaking out of their leaders brought both the problem of waste and the role of the corporation into the public arena. The media took an interest in their plight (several rag-pickers appeared on television, and many articles were published about "our zabaleen"), and debates were opened in the National Assembly at which representatives of the rag-pickers' corporation, religious leaders etc. were invited to speak. The arguments put forward to defend the rag-pickers' work can be summarized as follows: the efficient and almost free door-to-door collection system; their experience of recycling 80% of collected waste; their productivity and manpower; the environmental and ecological dimension of their professional know-how, recognized by international bodies but not in their own country (Dollet, 2003). All these aspects were hitherto totally and deliberately ignored by the public authorities.

Raising public awareness of the community and of its activities and professional experience, together with the obstacles confronting the foreign companies who were ill-prepared for the Cairene environment (Debout, 2012) and the difficulties of applying the reform in general, had an unexpected

14 The expression is taken from the title of a work by D. Corteel and S. Le Lay (2011).

15 I do not go into details here about the modalities of the waste management reform, other than observing that it was part of the prevalent ideology of modernization, with the decision to delegate the waste-collection service to foreign multinationals, with no possibility of including the rag-pickers. The latter, with their archaic practices, could not be considered as having a role in the new system, in spite of their experience. This negation of their role aroused a very strong sense of humiliation and injustice among the rag-pickers.

effect, namely, bringing the residents of Cairo into the debate. For example, the media reported the dissatisfaction of the Cairenes, who were used to the old door-to-door system and who had built up relationships of trust with "their zabaleen", who, moreover, cost them less than the tax imposed on their electricity bills for the new, but inadequate, service provided by the foreign companies. Indeed, the employees of these companies increasingly went on strike, and on several occasions the streets were piled high with rubbish, particularly during hot periods. The filth and consequent health risks added to the "public problem" which affected and was talked about by everyone.

These public debates forced the authorities to react and open negotiations. It is undoubtedly the first time in Egypt that negotiations had been held with representatives of the informal economy; the outcome was that sub-contracts were signed with the rag-pickers, initiating partial recognition of the informal collection sector (Debout, 2012). However, these transactions clearly excluded the "small zabaleen" at the bottom of the professional hierarchy and those who worked in small settlements with no leaders (workshop bosses or union) to represent them. These zabaleen felt very bitter that they had been left out of the current process[16]. The reform and its effects clearly accentuated and highlighted the professional inequalities within a corporation that was divided with regard to the means of protest and geographically scattered. In addition, competition and conflict between community groups were exacerbated by the crisis. Thus, heightened public awareness did not prevent the "*principle of discretion*" that occurs in behind-the-scenes public action, far from it. The rag-pickers also increased their small protest actions in the public space, situating them within the "universe of social practices [...], which also means that in many cases one is dealing with people who have a direct interest in intervening in the public action process with regard to a problem, and who intervene effectively" (Gilbert & Henry, 2012).

Finally, the negotiations concluded between political and administrative bodies (Ministry of the Environment, Governorates, cleaning agencies), private foreign and Egyptian companies, and the rag-pickers, led to the latter's right to work. For those who concluded sub-contracts, rubbish collection became legal and recognized – they are even paid for the service by the companies. It seems that, to a greater or lesser extent, all the decisions taken today involve representatives of the corporation – apart from pig slaughtering, discussed below. This recognition has enabled some to come out of the margins, and it has undoubtedly lessened the stigma for the community as a whole. Nevertheless, it is not a "formalization" of the informal, which is refused by all those concerned, including the rag-pickers.

16 Interviews carried out in 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2012 in the zabaleen districts of 'Ard el-Lewa, Batn el-Baqara and Manchiat Nasser.

Unofficial English version provided by the author of the Italian paper published in:
BOLLETTINO DELLA SOCIETA GEOGRAFICA ITALIANA
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3 – The pigs: an indefensible cause and a flagrant injustice

In May 2009, following the H1N1 flu epidemic, unfortunately known as swine flu, the Egyptian government, on the orders of the President, had 300,000 pigs slaughtered. Egypt was the only country in the world to take this decision, which was essentially political under cover of a health emergency, even though a large number of specialists and officials of international bodies (FAO, WHO, etc.) warned the authorities of the futility of the slaughter. This slaughter was a fatal blow for the rag-pickers; the pigs consumed 40% of the organic waste collected and constituted a real capital for them, as they could sell the meat and also make excellent compost from the slurry which they could sell for a good price.

There were very violent clashes between the anti-riot police and the zabaleen[17]. A number of videos made in Manchiat Nasser and posted on internet show the amateurism of the slaughter and the zabaleen's opposition to the police: insults, throwing various missiles, etc. For their part, far from opposing the slaughter, the Coptic deputies and priests supported the authorities' decision. For example, at the beginning of May 2009, Pope Chenouda, the spiritual leader of the Egyptian Copts, declared that his community did not eat pork which was reserved for tourists and foreigners, while Father Samaan, working and living in Manchiat Nasser, recommended that people should avoid places where pigs were kept (M. Tadroz, 2010). In general, very few voices (e.g. scientists, intellectuals or lay opponents) were raised to oppose this slaughter, and those who did take the risk of doing so were immediately and virulently criticized.

In the end, wiping out the pigs did not harm the religiosity of the authorities who did not leave the monopoly to the Muslim Brotherhood, and it showed the omnipresence and omnipotence of an aging and contested power – it was the head of State who closed the debate by taking the decision to slaughter the pigs. For their part, the zabaleen were all in agreement that the decision to slaughter the pigs was not due to the H1N1 flu but was aimed directly at them.

Slaughtering the pigs was indefensible and served above all to weaken permanently a corporation seen as undesirable in the city, whose land is sought after for property development, and whose professional practices disturb, even if their collection activity is indispensible for keeping the city clean. Indeed, one has the feeling that while the authorities see the rag-pickers as essential, this only applies to those who work as sub-contractors, essentially those in the large district of Manchiat Nasser. Before the 2011 revolution, the rag-pickers of Batn al-Baqara, for example, faced all sorts of pressure from property

17 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwMIlw7rCSc

developers wanting to get hold of their land, aided by the police and municipal surveyors. The latter came to measure plots and offered small sums of money for them. However, as long as they had work (even collecting illegally without a contract), and as long as the cycle of collection and recycling functioned thanks to the pigs, the rag-pickers of Batn al-Baqara did not yield to the threats; their land is clearly indispensible both as a place to live and for their livelihood, and they fought to keep their living and work space. From May 2009 and the loss of their animals, the professional situation for many deteriorated rapidly, and some agreed to sell their plots, while others looked for alternative work. The 2011 revolution did not fundamentally change the situation; on the contrary, the economic situation deteriorated further, including in the informal sector. However, what changed after the revolution was that the inhabitants we spoke to, whatever their economic difficulties, announced loud and clear that they would not leave and would no longer allow themselves to be pushed around.

Finally, this district of Batn al-Baqara, known as "the cow's entrails" because it is where the final waste from the abattoirs is thrown, seems to be the prime example of a margin. It is a spatial margin, because this district of hovels is located in a dip, a fault line in the city which is almost invisible from outside, with no facilities or infrastructure; it is also a social margin, because Copt and Muslim rag-pickers live there and keep pigs, branding them with the stigma of waste and impurity. And yet, during the interviews carried out in this district between 2009 and 2012, it seemed that the inhabitants did not view this marginal situation as an injustice as long as they were not confronted by the authorities or threatened by the property developers. This is not a matter of some kind of fatalism, and of course they talked about their everyday worries, but as they had never expected anything from the authorities, they coped as well as they could without them. On the other hand, the slaughter of the pigs and the threats facing the district produced a violent backlash, marking the switch from marginalisation to injustice, and from injustice to resistance.

Conclusion. From urbanity to citizenship

The issue of access to fundamental rights, with the underlying or explicit issue of access to greater justice, has thus been very present in Egypt for about ten years. I feel that it echoes an epistemological and paradigmatic revival of social sciences research into the town (sociological, political sciences, social geography, etc.), and that this is not entirely coincidental. Without wishing here to comment on current research, it seems to me that the shift from using words such as "marginalisation", "segregation" and "exclusion" (conceptualized notably by Marxist urban geography) to discussion in terms of social and spatial justice/injustice reflects a swing between urbanity and citizenship. The urban life-style of

inhabitants living on the fringes (geographically and socially) has been recognized for a long time in many studies published since the 1990s[18] which also highlight Henri Lefebvre's (2009) notion of "the right to the town", a notion that had been somewhat overlooked or depoliticized in the previous decade. According to this idea, the right to the town of people living on the fringes, which is ignored or denied by the public authorities (segregation, exclusion, marginalisation), is in some way compensated by various aspects of urbanity, of specifically urban skills and know-how put into practice by the inhabitants themselves. These skills, for example knowing how to build one's own house, sometimes justify the disengagement of the State, and in this specific example, the disengagement of social housing provision.

From this perspective, the rag-pickers are a prime example of this form of fringe urbanity. On the negative side (the margin), they live in "trash-zones" (*espaces-poubelles*; Lhuilier & Cochin, 1999), which in the hierarchy of margins are on the margins of the margins, near-invisible enclaves in hollows, crevices or interstices. The above comment about "trash-zones" can easily be transposed to "trash workers", who are inevitably contaminated because of what they handle, and who, because they are identified with filth and the unclean, have always been confined to the edge of towns (Lhuilier, Cochin, 1999, pp. 147-148), particularly as they keep pigs on Muslim territory. In this way, they are themselves producers of something marginal; moreover, the stigma that defines them has been incorporated into their language and their practices. In addition to their social invisibility, they are also professionally invisible (discretion in what they do and where they live). Paradoxically, it is when they stop collecting waste that they become visible and indispensible! This invisibility is also linked to the fact that they are not counted, that their settlements are not shown on maps, and that up to the 2000s their work received no recognition, other than taxing them for their right to collect.

On the positive side (urbanity), they have an excellent knowledge of the town through their waste collection work which gives them a position in both the informal and formal (local, national and international) networks linked to recycling. They created their activity and organized it in a highly structured corporation; they also organize their own housing (auto-construction) and much of their material, with the help of course of charitable and religious organizations. They are very autonomous

18 With regard to urbanity in the Arab world, we refer the reader to *La citadinité en questions* (Lussault, Signoles, 1996), *Les compétences des citadins dans le Monde Arabe* (Deboulet, Berry-Chikhaoui, 2000), and the review by I. Berry-Chikaoui (2009). *Vies Citadines* (Gervais-Lambony, Dorier-Appril, 2007) also provides a large number of texts and references on the issues of urbanity and *citadinité*. With regard to the notion of margins, it is interesting to see that two works have recently been published (*Marges au cœur de la ville*, 2006; *La ville face à ses marges*, 2008) and another work is due for publication (*Marges urbaines à l'épreuve du néolibéralisme,* 2014), indicating the renewed interest in French research for the issue of social and spatial inequalities. Finally, 4 *Cahiers d'Emam*, on line at revues.org, provides a recent and very thorough analysis of the emergence of new forms of urbanity at the margins, as well as urban movements in response to public policies.

in many domains, and thus for a long time they expected little, if anything, from the authorities.

In spite of their marginalisation, the invisibility of the rag-pickers protects them and affords them a degree of "tranquillity", and also without any doubt a "margin" of freedom (which they assert, frequently opposing any idea of formalization). Since 2002 and the reform of the waste-management system, this margin has taken centre stage, lying at the heart of numerous public debates. The zabaleen have also been the subject of a large number of films, videos and events, both abroad and in Egypt. The musicians in a group calling itself the "Zabaleen band" play instruments made from recycled material and campaign for social and environmental change.

Bringing the rag-pickers into public view in this way, and the awareness that they have the means of taking action (demonstrating, negotiating, striking and not collecting) to demand the right to collect, and more broadly, the right to work, has given their fight, even if it is very unequal, a highly political dimension which is similar to the fight for greater citizenship.

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Bénédicte Florin
Maître de conférences en géographie
Université de Tours
UMR 7324 CITERES- EMAM
Equipe Monde arabe et Méditerranéen